

CURRENT EVENTS CONVERSATION

What Students Are Saying About Learning to Write in the Age of A.I.

Does being able to write still matter when chatbots can do it for us? Teenagers weigh in on an essay from Opinion.

By The Learning Network

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With artificial intelligence programs like ChatGPT that can generate prose for us, how much should we care about learning to write — and write well?

In “Our Semicolons, Ourselves,” the Opinion contributor Frank Bruni argues that, for a multitude of reasons, communicating effectively is a skill we should still take seriously. “Good writing burnishes your message,” he writes. “It burnishes the messenger, too.”

We asked teenagers what they thought: Does learning to be a good writer still matter in the age of A.I.? Or will the technology someday replace the need for people to learn how to put pen to paper and fingers to keyboard?

Take a look at their conversation below, which explores the benefits of learning to express oneself, the promise and perils of chatbots, and what it means to be a writer.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the conversation on our writing prompts this week, including students from **Glenbard North High School in Carol Stream, Ill.; Hinsdale Central High School in Hinsdale, Ill.** and **New Rochelle High School in New Rochelle, N.Y.**

Please note: Student comments have been lightly edited for length, but otherwise appear as they were originally submitted.

Many students agreed with Mr. Bruni that learning to write is important. Some pointed to the practical reasons.

When you write any sort of persuasive essay or analysis essay, you learn to communicate your ideas to your audience. This skill can then be applied to your daily life. Whether it's talking to your teachers, writing an email to your boss, or sending a text message to your friends, writing and communication is a fundamental ability that is needed to clearly and concisely express yourself. This is something that A.I. cannot help you with.

— *Mara F.R., Hinsdale*

In order to write, we must first be able to think on our own which allows us to be self-sufficient. With the frequent use of A.I., our minds become reliant on given information rather than us thinking for ourselves. I absolutely believe that learning to be a good writer still matters even in the age of Artificial Intelligence.

— *Jordyne, Ellisville*

I firmly believe that learning good writing skills develops communication, creativity, and problem-solving skills. A.I. can also be used as a tool; I have used it to ask practice questions, compare my answers, and find different/better ways to express myself. Sure, having my essay written for me in seconds is great, but come time for an interview or presentation later on in my life I'll lack the confidence and ability to articulate my thoughts if I never learn how.

— CC, *San Luis Obispo County*

I, being a senior, have just finished my college applications. Throughout the process, I visited several essay help websites, and each one stressed this fact: essay readers want to hear a student's voice. ChatGPT can write well-structured essays in two minutes, but these essays have no voice. They are formulaic and insipid — they won't help a student get into UCLA. To have a chance, her essays must be eloquent and compelling. So, at least until AI writing technology improves, a student must put in the work, writing and rewriting until she has produced an essay that tells readers who she is.

— Cole, *Central Coast, CA*

Others discussed the joy and satisfaction that comes with being able to express oneself.

While AI has its advantages, it can't replicate the satisfaction and authenticity which comes from writing by yourself. AI uses the existing ideas of others in order to generate a response. However, the response isn't unique and doesn't truly represent the idea the way you would. When you write, it causes you to think deeply about a topic and come up with an original idea. You uncover ideas which you wouldn't have thought of previously and understand a topic for more than its face value. It creates a

sense of clarity, in which you can generate your own viewpoint after looking at the different perspectives. Another example is that the feeling of writing something by yourself generates feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. The process of doing research about a topic for hours, to then come up with your own opinion. Or the feeling of having to use a dictionary to understand a word which you don't know the meaning of. The satisfaction and authenticity of writing by yourself is irreplaceable. Therefore, it is still important to learn to be a good writer.

— *Aditya, Hinsdale*

You cannot depend on technology to do everything for you. An important factor of writing is expressing yourself and showing creativity. While AI can create a grammatically correct essay, it cannot express how you feel on the subject. Creativity attracts an audience, not being grammatically correct. Learning to write well-written essays without the assistance of AI is a skill that everyone should have.

— *Aidan, Ellisville*

A few commenters raised ethical concerns around using generators like ChatGPT.

I feel that even with AI, learning how to be a good writer still matters. For example, if you're writing a college essay or an essay for a class using an AI generated thing, that is plagiarism, which can get you in a lot of trouble because it is against the law to take something that is not yours and try to make it seem like it is your writing. So I believe that learning how to be a good writer still matters a lot because if you want to get into a good college

or get good grades, you need to know how to write at least semi-well and make sure the writing is in your own words, not words already generated for you.

— *jeo, new york*

There are obvious benefits, and I myself have used this software to better understand Calculus problems in a step by step format, or to answer my questions regarding a piece of literature, or time in history. That being said, ethics should be considered, and credit should be given where credit is due; as sources are cited in a traditional paper, so should the use of ChatGPT.

— *Ariel, Miami Country Day School*

Writing is still an important skill, but maybe not in the same way it has in the past. In an era of improving AI, topics such as grammar and spelling are less important than ever. Google already corrects small grammar mistakes; how long till they can suggest completely restructuring sentences? However, being a good writer is more than just grammar and vocabulary. It's about collecting your thoughts into a cohesive and thoughtful presentation ... If you want to communicate your own ideas, not just a conglomerate of ones on the internet, you're better off just writing it yourself. That's not to mention the plethora of issues like AI just making stuff up from time to time. So for now at least, improving your writing is still the best way to share your thoughts.

— *Liam, Glenbard West High School*

Several students shared how they use A.I. as a resource to aid, rather than replace, their own effort.

I think AI should be a tool for writers. It can help make outlines for writing pieces and it could help solve problems students are stuck on and give them an explanation. However, I think the line should be drawn if students use AI to do the whole entire assignment for them. That's when it should be considered cheating and not be used.

— *Sam, Hinsdale, IL*

Sometimes I use A.I. programs such as ChatGPT to help with typing and communication. The results vary, but overall I find it helpful in generating creative ideas, cleaning up language, and speeding up the writing. However, I believe it is important to be careful and filter the results to ensure accuracy and precision. AI tools are valuable aids, but human input and insight are still needed to achieve the desired quality of written communication.

— *Zach, New Rochelle High School*

As of now, A.I. is not capable of replacing human prose effectively. Just look at the data, the only A.P. tests that ChatGPT did not pass were the ones for English Language and English Literature. This data lays bare a fact that most students refuse to accept: ChatGPT is not able to write a quality essay yet. Now that many schools are loosening restrictions regarding the use of generative A.I., students have two options: either they get back to work or they get a bad grade for their A.I.-generated essay.

On the other hand, there is another alternative that is likely to be the best one yet. A good friend once said, "A.I. software like ChatGPT solves the issue of having a clean sheet of paper". By nature, humans are terrible at

getting anything started. This is the issue that ChatGPT solves. As Bruni asserts, “Writing is thinking, but it’s thinking slowed down — stilled — to a point where dimensions and nuances otherwise invisible to you appear.” This is true, but ChatGPT can help students by creating a rough draft of what those ideas might look like on paper. The endpoint is this: while students are likely to keep needing to become good writers to excel at school, A.I. technology such as ChatGPT and Grammarly will become additional tools that will help students reach even higher levels of literary excellence.

— *Francisco, Miami Country Day School*

But some thought we might not be far from a future where A.I. can write for us.

I think that AI will eventually replace the need for the average person to write at the level that they do. AI is no different than every other tech advancement we’ve made, which have made tasks like writing easier. Similar concerns could have been raised with the introduction of computers in the classroom, and the loss of people having great handwriting. I don’t think the prospect should be worrying. AI is a tool. Having it write for us will allow us to focus on more important things that AI is not yet capable of.

— *zack, Hinsdale Central*

AI is becoming wildly accessible and increasingly more competent. The growth of this sector could mean more students find their way to an AI site to look for an answer. I agree that this could spell trouble for student intelligence if passable answers are so readily available. But you might want to consider the students themselves. The majority are hardworking and

smart, not just smart about subjects in school, but about how using only AI for their work could end badly. Students will probably not use the newborn tech first hand until it is basically errorless, and that will take some time.

— *Beau, Glen Ellyn, IL*

Even so, there were students who doubted that technology could ever replace “what it means to be a writer.”

I don't think AI will fully be able to replace humans, no matter how much time we as a society take to implement it into everyday life, as they are still just a bunch of numbers and code, and the complexity of a human and the intricacies of our emotions, our thoughts, and feelings, along with what makes each of us an individual, someone that matters, proves that humans will never be able to be fully replicated by AI, and that the most emotion-centric jobs, such as writing, and most fields in art, will forever be, or should forever be, dominated by the experiences and emotional complexity of humans.

— *Liam, Hinsdale*

AI uses data from the internet it gathers and then puts together a paragraph or two, while it may be able to do this faster than any human, it does not have any authenticity. If it is pulling its information from the web where someone has said something similar, the data found may be biased and the AI would not care. Yet some people still insist it's the future for writing when in reality, AI will probably not come up with an original idea and only use possibly biased data to give to someone so they can just copy it and move on and undermine what it means to be a writer.

— *John, Glenbard North HS*

I have never personally used ChatGPT as I believe no robot can recreate the creativity or authenticity humans achieve in writing ... Even with growing advances in technology, AI can only create with the information it already knows, which takes away the greatest quality writers have: creativity.

— *Stella, Glenbard West*

In my opinion, learning to be a good writer absolutely still matters in the age of AI. While artificial intelligence can assist with certain aspects of writing, such as grammar and syntax checking, it cannot replace the creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence that we human writers bring to the table. Another reason is that storytelling, persuasion, and the art of crafting a compelling narrative are skills deeply rooted in human intuition and empathy. A good writer can connect with readers on a personal level, inspiring thoughts, feelings, and actions. AI may enhance efficiency, but it cannot replicate the authentic voice and unique perspective that a human writer brings to their work.

— *McKenzie, Warrington, PA*

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